

# Attracting & developing diverse future leaders in Management Consultancy

The Barton Partnership recently hosted a virtual panel discussion: **Attracting & developing diverse future leaders in Management Consultancy**

- MK** Matt Krentz - Managing Director & Senior Partner, Global Leadership and D&I Chair - **BCG**
- JH** Julie Hood - Head of Strategy & Transactions for EMEA - **EY**
- AP** Andrew Pearce - Managing Director & Executive Leadership Committee UK Chair - **Accenture**
- RP** Rebecca Pitman - Vice President, Human Resources - **Altman Solon**

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**Q.** We talk a lot about recruiting more diverse talent, but how are you increasing retention and advancement for diverse populations and under-represented populations within your organisations?

**JH** What's really important to us is ensuring that people feel like they belong so they can bring their full potential to the table. I think that also becomes incredibly important when we think about leadership positions. We need to make sure that when diverse or minority individuals have discussions with regards to choices in their careers, that they are able to reflect on what the right opportunity is for them and they see a path that can see them through to the whole journey of their career.

**AP** It's changed by the culture, and it's changed by leadership. **The first thing is to look at your data. What's your data really telling you? Having looked at that data then take actions.** That normally, if you look at retention and progression, means ensuring that people have sponsors, leadership, understanding the challenges of being diverse and the problems of affinity bias, that people don't get the same opportunities and therefore they don't get the progression. It's a journey. It's not going to change overnight. **And it's not about grand gestures, it's about systemic change, cultural competency, education, advocacy, and investment to really drive that change.**

**Q.** How do you measure the success of different initiatives you put in place? How do you know whether things are working or not?

**RP** As a boutique, I have to say bring in the experts. **You need to be looking at your retention data, you need to be looking at your promotion data, you need to be looking at your pay equity data,** and really tying that out to the findings and your diagnostic and your programming.

**MK** One of the key questions is, what are the measures that allow you to know whether you are starting to shift the culture and the environment in a way that is actually going to deliver the change in representation over time? Knowing your organisation and digging into what the experiences and hurdles are for particular individuals. For us 10 years ago, the representation of women in leadership was very small and we set out to change that over time. Given our pipeline and the number of women we had, we knew this was going to be a multi-decades effort. **We looked at what points we tend to see attrition early on in our pipeline and what causes that attrition. Then, what is the experience in particular around these points?** And so, in our engagement surveys we specifically added questions around the experience. We're able to look at our project leader level, which is often where we start to see fall off, and understand how that cohort was experi-

encing the work environment. Did they have somebody who was sponsoring them? Are they feeling that they have a pathway to success?

**Q.** You have a diversity strategy, but does it help everybody at once? Do you think about a differentiated strategy across different marginalised populations in different ways?

**AP** What is interesting about that, is that it is easier to create advocates for gender than it is for race. If you look at leadership, it tends to be white male. But those white males may very well have a daughter, a partner, a spouse, a mother. There's a natural understanding that they want a different way that the world is seen in terms of gender and it's more natural to be advocates. You don't necessarily have the same with race. **It's an interesting one because if you try and do everything, you'll achieve nothing, and there tends to be a focus.** But if you have a culture of inclusivity, then that applies to everybody.

**JH** It's about ensuring that we get true sponsorship that is flexing the styles and the experiences. **It is about listening. I think it's also being comfortable, good conflict and a maturity of robust conversations is very healthy for organisations** and bringing that good conflict to the table to really discuss and be open about it. And absolutely listening to those different cohorts, we can never presume, or assume that we know what other groups are going through.



**Q.** It has been predicted that women will take advantage of the hybrid working model more than men. How can organisations ensure that they're not creating a male-dominated workplace and that women continue to progress?

**MK** What we've started to talk about is how you set up norms of what the expectations are. If you're in the office and you're in a meeting, and some people are in the office and some people are not, then everybody has their Zoom on for them individually so that everybody can see each other's faces. The other thing is making sure we really set up expectations consistent with the time and the flex model that somebody is working under.

**JH** We shouldn't lose sight of the fact that when we weren't in this virtual environment, there were inequalities playing out in the physical space anyway. As we come back to some form of hybrid model, we double down or accelerate the focus on still getting this right. **So we think about the outputs that our practitioners and our professionals have. For that connectivity, where we need to get together and brainstorm and have leadership conversations and good conflict,** let's make sure they are truly inclusive, because then our people shine.

**Q.** What advice would you give individuals who are thinking about how to balance consulting and parenthood?

**JH** I've always tried to ensure that I've been true to myself. I'm a big believer in balance. I'm flexible, I get to do what I do as a professional, as a mum, and every now and then it goes pear shaped, but that's okay. I think that's where you have messy role models, not necessarily pure ones. The other thing I would say, **for anybody in any role, make sure that when you have a seat at the table, whatever that table, use it. Because you get to influence,** and this is a time in this profession where we will continue to evolve it. But if we do not use the voices at our table, then quite frankly, it's a missed opportunity.

**Q.** Can the panel talk about some of the pitfalls and successes of trying to build a sense of belonging in diverse communities?

**AP** Belonging is such an important concept. That kind of top right quadrant where your uniqueness is seen. I think for a long time, if you take consultancy particularly, people having to fit in because that's the only way that you can actually move and progress and that is incredibly wearing. I think you've got to be careful because to move that belonging mindset where that uniqueness is celebrated and is part of what you bring, in the past it meant that that person had to fix themselves. It's not about fixing black talent. It's not about fixing women. It's about belonging and belonging means that you bring everything that you are and it's welcome for it. Part of the problem with that is that to really belong you've got to first be comfortable with you who are and then be secure and comfortable that you're able to bring that into the workspace environment and it's welcomed.

**As a leader I think vulnerability is vitally important. And setting that example, and create that sense of belonging, showing that vulnerability really helps to drive engagement, and allows people to perform better allows us to have conversations better.**

**MK** Our research shows that when you ask leadership, particularly white, hetero male leadership, what their challenges are, they've experienced fewer hurdles and barriers to advancing their careers because they had more natural networks and there was an environment they were comfortable in. They also significantly under-appreciate the challenges - whether it be outright racism or whether it be the networks or biases that come in on a day to day basis - and therefore the hurdles to being successful if you're someone who is a racial minority or LGBTQ. **From a practical standpoint, leadership has to commit to 1. Engaging on this and 2. Start to educate what that experience and the differences in those experiences are.**

**JH** When we think about vulnerable leadership, there also needs to be an environment of trust. When you're in a good market, this is the time that we have to accelerate that even more. That environment of trust is something that we

cannot lose sight of because it's how we react to that vulnerability that will make us successful in the future. I think it is going to take a lot of coaching and development to make sure we do it right.

**Q.** How will the war for talent develop after Covid, and what does it take to attract high-potential talent?

**RP** We are certainly in a war for talent. Selling your value prop will continue to be very important. **Continuing to show your culture, what is meaningful to your company and the experience, really showing your recruitment, your team, what is means to work at your company.** And of course, watching your peers. It's okay to learn from others. So keep an eye on what's going on, keep an eye on what's meaningful to those you're talking to and make sure you're meeting their needs and expectations.

**Q.** Feedback is really important and something that is often overlooked. How do we make sure that it doesn't create bias or a culture of needing to fit in and actually enables diverse talent to flourish and succeed?

**MK** About 10 years ago we did a fair amount of work on this. We did have a culture that had a certain norm around how people behaved. It was about challenging, it was about speaking up and being willing to argue and debate points. If you were somebody who was an introvert, or if you were somebody who worked through building people rather than taking somebody on directly, it was often seen as not being as strong or as capable. **We've really tried to look at the language and educate people around some of these built in norms that we've tended to have, that we push people to fit in, and realise and educate people that there's multiple ways to manage conversations,** there's multiple ways to draw people in. As leaders, your responsibility is actually to draw people into the conversation not to see who pushes the hardest to get there. We've also done statistical analysis over time to look and say, do we see biases come out in the way we score or rate people? And if there are gaps or differences that we don't think are explainable, what's underneath that if we look into it? It is really important where you have those sort





of norms in your organisation that you are calling them out and understanding how you fix them, or how you make people aware of when they're using them as a crutch in terms of evaluating capability.

**JH** We need to make sure that we recognise the importance of feedback through the entire professional journey. We need to make sure that as we learn how to have right and authentic conversations, we don't shy away from it, and they will evolve because as we get more minority conversations happening, we will make mistakes, and that environment of trust for feedback is critical. Because that's when sponsorship truly comes alive, you can really only sponsor someone, if they've genuinely had the right feedback to continue.

**AP** It's also good to ask for feedback, Ask for feedback, go to your sponsor, your sponsor is essential to progress. As leaders, don't wait a year to give the feedback. Give it to them in a continuous cycle, whether it's informal or formal. And the other thing associated with that, **recognise people, it costs nothing to pick somebody up and say thank you, and it has a huge impact about how people feel and behave or engage with a company.** Just recognition for what they've done, whether it's a quick phone call or a quick email, or a handwritten note.

**Q.** Can you share three key initiatives that people can take back and start in their own organisations to impact D&I?

**RP** First is leaning on expertise. Brining in internal or external team members for diagnostic, or roadmap or implementation plan. Making sure you're got someone holding you accountable and involved in the day to day. Secondly, **ensure you're not asking the same people to contribute to all DE&I efforts, especially if you're a smaller company.** Make sure you're pulling in your allies so that there's not a disproportionate burden on any individual or demographic group to really be advancing and leading here. And finally, partnering with leadership. Leadership's commitment, leadership's involvement, the team wants to hear from them, the team wants to see them they're involved.

**MK** First, I would say in the environment we're in, really understanding where your gaps are and why they happen. **An initiative you can undertake today is when you have people who are departing or leaving or aren't being successful, do you really understand what their experience was and why it didn't work out?** And what is therefore that you can do to intercede or interject that changes the outcome?

The second, for racial minorities, what we've seen in our research is that it is really the first 2-3 three years of a career, even 18 months, that either set on a good trajectory or a not good trajectory. **So, really looking at your organisation and how you are onboarding, giving feedback, and helping grow and support in those early years. Are you actually creating the culture that allows those individuals to be successful?** Are they actually getting the sponsorship and the feedback that they need to develop on a successful career path?

The third thing is how do we think about tackling flex work models and the way we work together? How do we actually work in this mixed mode model without biasing our organisations towards reinforcing what I would say historically has been the white male workforce model.

**JH** Make sure you understand 'why'. Why is whatever you're about to do important to your organisation? And make sure that your leadership is bought into that for the authentic rationale, this cannot be lip service. **Whatever that context is for your organisation, make sure you have those robust conversations. And then importantly, make sure that you take that and you listen to your people and play that back, because then you start to drive the accountability.** The other thing is that we have to start this early. The war for talent is significant in all of our environments, so the narrative of that value proposition and then really living to it is important. My final one would be to challenge ourselves to make sure we bring diverse thinking and talent to everything we're doing in every aspect.

**AP** The data isn't the be all and end all but it's a very good start point. People are normally surprised when they actually see the data. If talk about ethnicity for a moment, don't make this about saying, here's our BAME population, at 20% we're done. Be honest with yourself, split up that data and get a true reading about what you're really representing from an ethnicity perspective and understand what that means to business. For example, in the UK in 2017 24 billion was left on the table, because companies didn't engage with black communities. You need to have inclusive, diverse teams to drive that next set of innovation. If you're not, you're thinking as you've always thought and that's not really adding innovation and you're going to lose out.

Then you've got the human element; leadership accountability. **You have to set leadership accountability. They are responsible for the culture and what happens in the organisation. You need an executive sponsor at that most senior level who is the top ally and who can talk about their journey.** Because people are concerned about making mistakes as they go through these conversations, and you will make mistakes, and that is fine. But you need to understand it's a safe space to have those conversations. You have to get uncomfortable as you get more comfortable. So you need that education, you need those advocates to be created, and then need to invest. It's investing in the talent, understanding what you need to do to create that advocacy and having leadership engagement.

Tune in to the full conversation [HERE](#).

